

The Importance of Parental Projective Care in Perceived Parenting Effectiveness in African American Upper Middle Class Families

Authors : Susan D. Toliver

Abstract : Within the professional research literature on parenting in the United States, there is a paucity of research on parenting within the African American or Black community. Research on parenting focused on African Americans within the upper middle class, who constitute a critical and growing sector within the African American population, is all but non-existent. Research to address this void is needed. Despite the progress that has been made toward eliminating the long-standing racial divides in U.S. society, these divides persist and continue to affect different experiences and opportunity structures for White Americans versus Black Americans, including those in the upper middle class. Achievement of middle and upper middle class status of adult heads of families has generally been seen as the route to greater success and well-being for their children. While higher family class status is positively correlated with these factors, the strength of the relationship between higher social class and success and well-being is weaker for Black American families as compared to White American families. In light of the realities of racial inequality, African American parents, including those who have achieved higher status, have unique concerns for their children. African American parents, on the basis of their own experiences and their sense of the world as being highly racialized, anticipate the kinds of experiences that their children are likely to encounter as they grow and mature from childhood to adulthood and beyond. Racial discrimination and macro and micro racial aggressions are continued sources of concern for these parents. On the basis of in-depth personal interviews with upper middle class African American parents, findings suggest that the parenting goals and strategies of African American parents are influenced by the continuing significance of race as a social divide, including in higher socio-economic strata, in the United States. Black American families' parenting practices differ from those of White American families and are inclusive of the unique factors that threaten the well-being of African American children. Specifically, parenting practices are shaped by parents' fears about the racial experiences that they anticipate that their children will encounter. Parents' perceptions of parental effectiveness are linked to their ability to prepare their children for success in confronting, understanding, and contextualizing racial inequalities and aggressions. Theories of Parental Projective Care are useful in understanding the special considerations and unique parenting goals and behaviors of higher status African Americans.

Keywords : African American parenting, parental projective care, parenting effectiveness, racial socialization, upper middle class parenting

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